

The Angels

As we draw closer to Christmas, angels are among the characters we see in the story of Jesus' birth. We read how the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and give birth to the Messiah, the "*Son of God*" (Luke 1:35), whom God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. We also remember the angels who visited the shepherds out in the fields that night (Luke 28-15). Often, we see angels as messengers of God throughout Scripture. Following Jesus' crucifixion and burial, the angel's message to the women at the tomb was that Jesus had risen as He said and that they should announce this fact to His disciples (Matthew 28:6-7).

Isaiah 6:1-8 offers a beautiful portrait of Confession and Absolution. Seeing God in His temple, the prophet Isaiah is moved to confess his guilt in God's awesome and holy presence. Through the actions of the angel, God broke the barrier between Himself and Isaiah and forgave Isaiah's sin. The seraph, a type of winged angel, took a burning coal from the altar of sacrifice, pointing to the atonement secured by the shedding of blood. The angel's message of reconciliation ("*Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for*" [Isaiah 6:7]) brought God's forgiveness personally to Isaiah. This Absolution moved the prophet and enabled him to powerfully preach to God's people concerning the coming Christ (Isaiah 7:14).

Although the Bible mentions angels in almost three hundred passages, no one passage tells us about their creation. While Genesis 1 is silent about their creation, John 1:1-5 informs us that before God created the universe, nothing existed besides Him. Also, Genesis 2:2-3 shows that God rested from all His creative work on the seventh day. From these two passages, we learn that God created angelic beings sometime during the six days when He created "all things visible and invisible," as we confess in the Nicene Creed. If those who doubt that God created angels at all find no mention of them in Genesis 1, they should look at passages where Jesus, God in human flesh, confirms their existence (see Matthew 22:30; 25:31; Luke 16:22).

Psalms 148 begins with the Hebrew word Hallelujah, meaning "Praise the Lord." This psalm depicts all of God's creation singing a great hymn of praise to its Creator, God. Note how "angels" and "hosts" (v.2) are included with "heavens" and "heights" (v.1), "sun," "moon," and "stars" (v.3) - indeed, with everything else that God created. The implication is clear: God created angels.

Colossians 1:15-17 affirms what we learned from John 1:1-5, namely, that the pre-incarnate Son of God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was active in creating all that was made. This includes angels. Nehemiah 9:6 teaches that God created the host of heaven, which worships Him. Angels are called "*the host of heaven*" (1 Kings 22:19) or the "*heavenly host*" (Luke 2:13). Therefore, part of angelic activity is to worship the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In one of his table talks, Martin Luther said that he thought God did not describe the creation of invisible angels because God did not want people to speculate about it. In Acts 23:8 Paul says that the Jewish sect called the Sadducees denied both the bodily resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. Some people today also doubt their existence. But denying angels' existence breaks the First Commandment, because such denial exalts human reason above God; the Second Commandment, because it besmirches the holiness of God's Word and calls Christ a liar; the Third Commandment, because it contravenes God's Word, the exact opposite of holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it; and the Eighth Commandment, because it doubts God's Word and accuses God of being untruthful.

As Christians, we confess our belief in God's creation of the angels in the First Article of the Nicene Creed when we say God is the "maker of ... all things visible and invisible," including angelic beings. The Creed reflects not only the scriptural truth concerning God's creation of the angels, but also the source of our forgiveness of sins, including the sin of disbelief in angels, which is found in the Second Article: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ ... who for us men and for our salvation."